

A Strangely Frigid February Night by Rosy_el

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Summary:

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Author's Note:

..... yeah

February, 1988

The images flashed hotly through her mind, her eyelids twitching and her breathing ragged.

It was Mike. He was slumped against the white tile, beaten and bleeding and too still.

Then he was in the room—the room where they used to throw her if she refused to do what they'd asked. And he was crying and begging and sobbing a word like it was venom on his tongue.

“El.”

And then he was in the testing room and they had him hooked up to wires and had needles sticking out of his arms and he was crying and yelling her name.

There was Papa. He was telling Mike to find her. To tell him where she was hiding.

And then it was El, wired up and standing in front of a cage. Papa rubbed her back and told her what she needed to do. “Hurt.”

She turned to look at what animal was in the cage this time.

Mike stared back, his face severed by the bars between them.

Papa's breath was cold on her neck. “Hurt him.”

Mike looked at her like he had finally realized what she really was. The monster.

El shot up in her bed, panting and tears scorching her cheeks and throat aching. Had she screamed? Her body was hot and her sheets

felt sweaty and she was sobbing—she couldn't stop.

Miles away, Mike's eyes shot open. Something was wrong. He glanced at the alarm clock. 3:12. Something was very wrong. He was pulling on socks and a coat and before he had time to think.

El yelped and clutched at her pillow when she heard it. A thump against her window. Her body shook, painful sobs still racking her chest. Another thump.

Tapping, like a finger, she realized. She wiped her face on the back of her hand and watched the window uneasily.

"El?"

She shivered and then fell still. She could have recognized that voice anywhere.

"Mike?" She whispered, throwing off her blankets and padding over to the window. She tossed the pink curtains open and there he was, shivering in the weirdly bitter February night air. She choked down a whimper and opened the window. He slipped in without a word.

El shuddered as the frigid air met her bare legs; she suddenly realized she was only in an extra-big t-shirt that hit her upper-thigh. Mike swallowed and cast his eyes away from her figure.

"What's wrong?" He asked instead, his big coat still on. She sniffed and wiped her hand across her wet cheek again, embarrassed suddenly. She pushed the window closed.

"It was a nightmare," she murmured, her gaze on the floor. "A bad one."

She always understated the paralyzing dreams that hit her in the night, starting from when she reappeared in 1984. The bad dreams were rare now. But El's description of the nightmare this time sent a chill down Mike's spine.

She stared at the floor and then made her way to the bed, where she crawled up and sat on its edge, legs dangling over and face still blotchy. Mike watched and then then walked over, planting himself

in front of her. El brought her eyes up from his green socks to his face, where he peered down at her, dark eyes careful and soft.

He kept his eyes on hers as he bent and knelt on the carpet, her knees touching his stomach. "It was you, Mike," she breathed, new tears in her eyes just threatening to spill over.

Mike's expression was unchanging as his hand found the bottom of her hanging foot, running his fingers along the sole. She trembled.

"I'm right here," he said quietly. El reached out and wrapped her arms around him, his coat making a scratchy sound on her skin. He rubbed circles into her back and then she reached her arms up and under his coat, pushing the heavy thing off of him. It slipped down his arms and fell to the floor.

El slid her petite hand into his bigger one and pulled him onto the bed, so their bodies were laid on top of her messy covers. Mike listened to the lock on the door click into place.

Her leg touched his. "You looked at me like—" her words sounded suffocated and she swallowed. "Like you hated me."

Mike shook his head and pulled her into him, so her back was pressed up to his chest and their knees were bent together. El shuddered. Mike didn't know what was happening inside him; there was something about the stuffy 3 a.m. darkness that made them act this way: uninhibited and honest and bold.

"It was just a nightmare," he whispered into the back of her neck, stirring her longish hair. She could feel goosebumps spring up across her skin.

They could each feel the other breathing, deep and long, in and out. Mike's hand floated up and down her arm and she hoped he hadn't noticed that her t-shirt had ridden up, barely covering her hip. But it was dark so she doubted. Her face felt sticky and itchy but she ignored it, too aware of the boy holding her. El broke the silence after some unknown stretch of time.

"Tell me a secret," she asked softly.

His fingers stopped on her arm.

“Mike?” She whispered aloud, wondering if he had fallen asleep.

The boy, however, was more awake than ever. Mike’s heart rattled against his ribcage and he made a decision in that fragment of a midnight moment. He had been fighting the truth for a long time now and it was burning inside him, lusting to spill out. Something about the ungodly hour.

“I’m in love with you.”

El froze in his arms, lungs all at once empty and lips falling open.

Then she flipped around and found his eyes—shadowy and scared but just so *Mike*. Everything about him made El’s heart want to crawl up and out of her mouth. His freckles looked like stars on his milky skin, even in the darkness that soaked the pair.

“How do you know?” Her mouth was so close to his.

Mike blinked and his brow arched for a moment. “I’m not sure, I—” he tried to collect his thoughts but they were everywhere—all spread out on the bed and floating to the ceiling and sinking to his toes. “I’ve known it for a long time, I guess.” He paused again. “I think the person you love makes magic real. And you don’t even know how the world had any color before they came into it, you know?” He smiled and she felt her heart grow. It must have.

“That’s love?”

“Well, that’s being *in* love. I love my mom and Holly and all our friends, but in a different way. They make me happy and I care about them all and I would do anything for them but being *in* love...” His smile faded and he looked down.

“Being *in* love makes you want to do this.” He found her lips in the dark and pressed a soft kiss to them.

It suddenly felt a million degrees in that little bedroom.

“All of that—that’s being in love?” She breathed.

His eyes sunk and he played with her fingertips. “I think so.”

She could feel it everywhere inside her. She knew.

“I’m in love with you too, Mike.”

He let out a sigh like someone had finally filled his lungs with air again.

“Oh, good.”

When 6 o’clock was about to hit and the sun would be creeping over Hawkins once more, they figured it would be best for him to duck back out. You know, before Hopper got concerned at El’s locked door and broke it down.

So Mike slid the window open and hoisted himself up. El started to slide it back into place but Mike’s hand shot out, bringing the glass to a halt. She looked up to see him smiling—the sun on his mouth.

“I love you, El.”

She laughed and felt her face grow hot. The night was wearing off.

“I love you, Mike.”

A red tint danced on his cheeks.

“Good.”

Author's Note:

As always, thank you for reading :)